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Stalking

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"Why did you install that camera in that toilet? Did you know that you were hurting other people like the three women who sit in this room now?"

"Because I was bored" I had answered. And that was the biggest lie ever as I, since I first saw Cristina an August day of 24 years ago, I have never been bored.

"This is Cristina, a new PhD student, she is from Italy" Our professor had entered the lab. Strangely, he was not in a hurry.

Talking about our professor was our favourite hobby. He used to walk around with many papers in his hands, always walking, reading and eating at the same time. However, this time he had not an apple or an ice cream in his hands. He was just standing there and on his right, there was a girl, with makeup and intelligent eyes, with miniskirt and small shoes. She had started a PhD in software engineering and should sit with us in the lab for the next three years. Who was that girl, that Cristina? Why was she here in a lab full of nerd boys?

I had not been in the same room with a girl since I was 16 years old and I had chosen to study in an experimental high school with specialization in electrical engineering where there were no girls. During the computer science studies there were in fact five girls in our class but I had never spoken to any of them. And no girl had chosen to specialize in software engineering. I had never been interested in girls. My big interests were foreign languages and programming languages.

I felt in love with Cristina even before I heard her pronouncing her first English words with her strange accent and some German words. I did not know how to love, I was a nerd and I started to use all my knowledge, my programming abilities, and the system password to start my own love process that was an enquiring process, that had one simple objective: gain knowledge, all possible knowledge about Cristina. I read every single mail she was writing and every C file she was programming and all the English words she was writing for her first research papers.

My other passion, in addition to languages and Cristina, was research. I had read several books about research methods and I was the most successful researcher of all boys in the lab. If I am not a professor as many of the other guys and Cristina is because of a choice I made - because of Cristina - to become a system administrator. Nobody has ever understood my choice, neither our professor nor my former colleagues. The choice was simple: I wanted to have access to the system passwords in order to control all emails and files of Cristina. It is amazing that nobody has understood it. For 23 years, I had never made a mistake, before the day the camera I had installed in a toilet at university was discovered by a cleaner. And that was not because of my mistake, it was because a water problem in the toilet that had made the cleaner to clean in a different day than usual. But this happened after 23 years of continuous stalking.

My enquiry about Cristina was systematic. I was always learning new enquiry methods, first of all the Italian language, the geography and political situation of that country. Several boys in the lab shared an Italian dictionary and flirted with Cristina. I was never jealous as they were not seriously in love with her nor she was in love with any of them. The research data I was collecting about Cristina soon revealed to me some discrepancies. She was extremely social and she quickly made many new friends and she received emails and telephone calls and invitations from her new friends at the university. But why did she never receive any message from anybody in Italy?

Cristina learned Norwegian quickly and she spoke our language with the same characteristic accent she had when speaking English. I have always been interested in pronunciation. I can recognize Norwegian dialects from the whole country and I love to distinguish English pronunciations of people who speak English as a second language. During my first trip to Italy, that took place during

the Easter vacation few months after Cristina had joined our lab, I went to Rome, the city from which Cristina came from. I quickly recognized by talking English to the few Italian who could speak the language, that all people in Rome were speaking English with the same accent, and that accent was different than the one of Cristina. Why did Cristina had a different accent? These questions intrigued me as they made my love and inquiry project more challenging and I get more and more obsessed by her and my investigation.

I decided that I had to find somebody who speak English with the same accent as Cristina and I get the idea that I could spend my summer vacation to talk to Italian tourists in my home town Bergen. I had my own protocol of questions I could ask to people and the research project "Which accent does Cristina have?" get a validated answer after one week and some dozens of conversations with Italian tourists. People from Tuscany were speaking in that way.

Next summer I went to Florence, I visited Uffizi and Boboli and I had with me a picture of Cristina which I showed to several persons, but nobody knew about her. Cristina never went back to Italy. She worked and travelled to different conferences and she soon became a good programmer and writer of papers. Sometimes at night I accessed her files and improved her C programs and English texts. Cristina's program were good, but she inserted a lot of mistakes. She was not patient and she always left the lab when something was too difficult. "I will think of it tomorrow, like Rossella O'Hara". she used to say. So I fixed almost everything during the night and it was such a joy for me when she, the day after, could scream "Yes! Now it is working. Yesterday we were simply too tired both me and the program".

Cristina and I were among the first to finish our PhDs. I applied for a job as an administrator so I could keep my system password. She applied as an assistant professor, she moved from the lab to an office for herself, but I could still see her each day and read her emails and slides. Cristina moved together with her boyfriend. She soon got her first child. I was not really jealous and since she never stopped working I could still read her emails and her files and I developed my new routines to see her at least one per day while she was walking with her baby during the day. We had started a kind of ménage, Cristina with her companion, baby, and work as a teacher, I with my IT system and my stalking activities.

It was after year 2000, many years after Cristina had come to the university, that some new data became available to me. Search engines were flourishing and I knew how to observe her searches. She was often searching for "Pisa" and "Barbieri" and "Martini". I decided that I had to go to Pisa and repeat the investigation I had run in Florence almost 9 years before. This was my first mistake. It was the mistake that took Cristina away from our controlled life. Having Pisa 100.000 inhabitants, I had estimated that if I had showed Cristina's picture to 1000 people, somebody would have recognized her and told me something about her. I went to the central bar Salza and after 15 minutes, not only somebody had recognized the picture as being lawyer Elena Barbieri, but a man has taken with violence the picture from my hands.

I was walking back to my hotel to plan my next steps when a man came to me and said in Italian "Amico!". Amico means friend but that man was not friendly. He wanted to know more. «That picture is a picture of Luisa Barbieri a girl who had left Pisa 10 years ago and died in a fire in Norway.» He told me with such an Italian accent that I would have found funny if I had not been so scared.

Suddenly I remembered of the fire that had happened the same summer when Cristina had come to Norway in which a foreign student and a Norwegian boy had died. Unfortunately it was not only me who had understood. The "Amico" who was the former boyfriend of Luisa understood that he should follow me. And in this way, I took him against my will right in the life of my Cristina who

still was his Luisa.

In the following years, Cristina and her Italian boyfriend started to write to each other and talk almost continuously. It was by those emails that I had the confirmation that Cristina was Luisa Barbieri, and that she had chosen to become Cristina almost as a game that had taken control over her. She had met Cristina on the train to Norway, they had become friends and Luisa had the passport of Cristina in her bag when Cristina had died in the fire at the student house. I was expecting that the truth should come to light for everybody, that Cristina and her companion should divorce, that Cristina should become Luisa and return to Italy. It was then I started to feel bad, almost desperate, and my colleagues, worried by the fact that I was neither showering nor eating properly, contacted the doctor of the university, I had a serious depression and I spent a couple of months in a mental health hospital.

Even if I never mentioned Cristina to my therapists, I came back to life with the intention of creating a normal life for myself and I contacted an Indonesian girl on a net side. She came to Norway and after two years we were married, we had one child and she was pregnant again. Like an alcoholic I had never touched the emails of Cristina again. Cristina also got a new baby and when I saw her with the pram something happened in me and I felt an urge to know everything about Cristina again. As Cristina had become Luisa again in spite of many years of trying to become a different person, I was also becoming the old nerd who prefer to spend the nights looking at the traces somebody leaves on the internet rather than enjoying real life and real family.

The new questions about Cristina were as interesting as the ones I had worked with 20 years before. Was the baby the son of the ex boyfriend? Was that guy still together with Cristina? Now given that I knew so much about Cristina, Who was Luisa? Why did Luisa leave her boy friend if she returned to him with so much energy after more than 15 years? And was he still visiting Cristina?

Amico, the ex boyfriend, after a period of romantic obsessive love soon became the violent stalker he has always been and from which Luisa had escaped 20 years before. It was the time when I started to put hidden video cameras everywhere, in Cristina's office and in the toilets that she used to visit. It was my way to protect Cristina from him.

I saw Cristina during the act in which I was condemned to 6 weeks of prison for having installed one single camera in a single toilet for one single time. The two women who are filmed in that single video get a reimbursement of 20.000 NOK each, which I will have to pay. For the first time I told "I am sorry I will never do it again" to Cristina and I looked her in her eyes.

She did not say anything but in her eyes I read that she forgives me. But what does she know about me, his stalker? And who is Cristina?